

CURRENT AND FUTURE CHALLENGES FACING NATURE-BASED RECREATION INDUSTRIES

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PURPOSE OF PANEL DISCUSSION

How do viewpoints expressed by panelists influence Commission's thoughts about jurisdiction's recreational resources and LURC's vision? Are the 1997 CLUP goals and policies related to recreational resources in keeping with the challenges facing nature-based recreation industries?

SPEAKERS

- Bryan Wentzell – Appalachian Mountain Club
- Rick Givens – Maine Sporting Camp Association
- Don Hudson – Chewonki Foundation

BRYAN WENTZELL, APPALACHIAN MOUNTAIN CLUB

The AMC is America's oldest conservation and recreation organization. The organization's operations include eight backcountry huts in the White Mountains National Forest and, in Maine, the Swans Falls campground, Echo Lake on Desert Island, Georgetown Island, and most recently Little Lyford Pond Camps.

The AMC has recently developed a Maine Woods Initiative. The program's long-term (100 year) vision is to maintain a new center for backcountry recreation opportunities, as well as land conservation, education, recreation infrastructure, and sustainable forestry opportunities. In December 2003, the AMC purchased 37,000 acres from International Paper, known as the Katahdin Iron Works tract. The 37,000 acre area is within the 100-mile wilderness region and includes many great ponds and opportunities for hiking, as well as a fascinating forestry history. With the purchase of Little Lyford Pond Camps, the AMC has already made many investments in the recreational infrastructure, building 10 miles of trails in 2004 and significantly upgrading the Little Lyford facility. These investments have resulted in an increased use of the facility, and thus has brought more recreationists into the area.

Future plans for the AMC include placement of a permanent conservation easement on the Katahdin Iron Works tract, to be held by the State; FSC certification; 100 miles of new hiking and cross-country skiing trails; enhancement of dog sledding opportunities; creation of a cultural heritage map of southern Piscataquis County; working cooperatively with the Fermata study to promote nature-based tourism; and generally building relationships with neighbors and communities.

The 1997 CLUP does a decent job of identifying the importance of remote backcountry recreation. The reason that AMC members and other recreationists visit this area is for these remote backcountry opportunities. They expect to find primitive land and water recreation experiences. LURC is encouraged to continue on this track. Although AMC has purchased enough land to ensure that such backcountry experiences are available within the organization's ownership, concern was expressed that the remote backcountry experience in the surrounding area is very sensitive to infringement from development as well as motorized recreational activities.

RICK GIVENS, MAINE SPORTING CAMP ASSOCIATION

Sporting camps have been in existence in Maine for well over 100 years. Sporting camps were established due to a demand for quality hunting and fishing opportunities. There are several challenges facing the industry:

1. Resource accessibility. As a result of increased accessibility with the construction of logging roads, the quality of hunting and fishing declined and so did the number of operating sporting camps.
2. Declining youth interest. The younger population appears to have a declining interest in hunting and fishing activities. Camps are thus seeing a drop in hunting and fishing guests.

3. Protection of resources. Sporting camp owners are very dependent of the hunting, fishing, scenic, and remote resources in their immediate vicinity. Ideally, a sporting camp is located on a relatively undeveloped water body with good scenic value and hunting/fishing resources, with the assurance that these attractions will endure.
4. Changing patterns of land ownership. As land is sold, new landowners are seeking to maximize their return on investment by selling portions of their lands for development and finding income from activities other than forest products. Others may choose to limit access or close their land to hunting and other traditional activities.

To address some of these challenges, sporting camps are now trying to focus more on nature-based activities to fill “off-season” times as well as the decline in hunting and fishing guests. These are so called “non-consumptive” activities, such as canoeing, kayaking, skiing, hiking, bird-watching, GPS courses, etc. Sporting camp owners are finding that amenities sought by guests who participate in these activities are different than those of the past, and are trying to adapt to new expectations (including more up-scale facilities).

In the past, LURC has recognized the uniqueness of sporting camps, particularly in developing policies such as not using adjacency to sporting camps as a basis for rezoning to a development subdistrict; special exception criteria for establishing sporting camps in protection subdistricts; and exceptions for reconstructing non-conforming structures. This is appreciated and LURC is encouraged to continue these policies. LURC and other government agencies can continue to support the sporting camp industry by taking the following steps:

1. Adequate fish and wildlife regulations so that resources can be sustained.
2. Adequate restraint in forest practices to maintain water quality, wildlife habitat and scenic value.
3. Protection on the undeveloped character in the immediate vicinity of a sporting camp. This could be accomplished through a number of regulatory mechanisms. For instance, re-evaluating the D-GN subdistrict designation for sporting camps in existence prior to 1971 and create a new protection subdistrict specifically designated for commercial sporting camps; establishing stronger consideration of cultural values and impacts on traditional uses and activities when evaluating rezoning petitions or development proposals; addressing the problem of conversion of sporting camps into condominiums or family compounds; and establishing a new lake classification to one least appropriate for additional development for any lakes where a sporting camp exists (i.e. an outstanding cultural resource rating should be considered in determining the management class for lakes on which a sporting camp is located).
4. Ease of permitting for expansion of sporting camps to accommodate nature-based tourists.

DON HUDSON, CHEWONKI FOUNDATION

The Chewonki Foundation has been in existence for approximately 90 years. The organization's mission is to educate young people individually and in community with others by providing educational experiences that foster an understanding and appreciation of the natural world. Chewonki has a strong emphasis on nature study and conservation. As a result, the foundation is a conservation easement holder for a number of areas in the unorganized territories, including the Big Wood Pond site in Attean Township. These easement holdings, combined with some acquisitions, serve as places to take small groups on overnight trips throughout the year.

The biggest challenge facing the Chewonki Foundation is access to wilderness resources. The changing ownership of land has had an impact on the way Chewonki conducts its work. As a result, Chewonki has taken the initiative to acquire property and easements in order to assure itself long-term access to conduct on-site nature study, both in the North Woods (via easement holdings in Attean – Big Wood Pond and the 2001 acquisition of the Big Eddy campground) and on the coast (via gift acquisition primarily; currently, looking to purchase four coastal islands, including Hungry Island).

The Chewonki Foundation relies heavily on educating youth in a “wide open and soaring” setting. This type of backdrop provides a unique opportunity for youth to contemplate their place in the world. The Commission should continue to manage and protect the values that will allow these kinds of opportunities to continue in the future.